

Opening Statement
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Chairman, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific
U.S. Policy toward South Asia
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On behalf of the Subcommittee, I would like to express a warm welcome to Assistant Secretary Rocca and our other panel of distinguished witnesses. We appreciate your appearance before us this morning and look forward to an exchange of views.

The hearing today is intended to review United States foreign policy priorities in South Asia and assess related opportunities and challenges to American interests.

Just a short decade ago, the notion that the U.S. would be deeply engaged with virtually all countries in the region on a panoply of people-to-people, economic, political and security concerns would have been deemed extraordinarily unlikely by America's foreign policy establishment. Today, America's increasingly close relationship with the region is not only accepted as a matter of course but is coupled with a deep-seated desire in Washington for even warmer societal ties.

There are many reasons for increased American involvement South Asia. I would like to emphasize one: demographic trends.

According to United Nations estimates, by 2050 India will have replaced China as the world's most populous country with roughly 1.6 billion people. Astonishingly, Pakistan is projected to overtake Indonesia as the world's fourth most populous country with 305 million (or roughly twice the population of Russia) and Bangladesh is anticipated to be the eighth largest at about 245 million. If accurate, the implications of those projections are profound, not only for the region and world economy but for basic social and political stability. For these and other reasons, it is important that America pay increasing attention to the region in the years ahead.

In this regard, the Administration's strategic intent in South Asia is clear. It seeks to accelerate the development of a democratic partnership with India, maintain a stable and enduring relationship with a moderate Pakistan, and continue to nurture respectful and mutually productive relations with the other countries in the region. In my view, the Congress strongly supports these objectives.

While the broad outline of Administration objectives are clear, U.S. policy approaches at any given moment will of necessity require nuanced judgments.

For example, there is virtually no dissent in Washington from the precept that India and the United States should become natural allies with compelling incentives over time to cooperate closely on a host of regional and global concerns. In this regard, the Congress is looking forward to the visit by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh later next month.

I would be hopeful that the Administration will unambiguously announce support for Indian permanent membership on the UN Security Council at that time. We recognize, of course, that both countries have certain divergences of view on issues ranging from Burma and Iran to the Sudan, as well as on aspects of international trade policy and, of course, the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

With respect to Pakistan, President Musharraf's support for the campaign against terrorism is seminally significant. Pakistani policies may be imperfect, but Pakistan, the U.S., and the world are better off with the development of respectful rather than antagonistic relations between our two countries.

Turning to Nepal, it is self-evident that India, the U.S. and United Kingdom must all continue to work together to urge reconciliation between the King and the political parties in order bring the Maoists back to the negotiating table. Unfortunately, however, there are few signs that the King is fully committed to multi-party democracy. Delhi, London and Washington will have to calibrate their approach accordingly.

Elsewhere in the region, the coalition government in Colombo continues to debate the efficacy of a "joint mechanism" to provide tsunami relief to Tamil-majority areas of the North and East. Agreement on such an aid mechanism could be an important confidence building measure and catalyst for the stalemated peace process. Turning to Bangladesh, while America continues to seek strengthened relations with this historically moderate Muslim-majority country, there are troubling signs of growing political violence and deteriorating governance.

Finally, I would be remiss not to mention the plight of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. Tragically and inexcusably, a major humanitarian impasse has developed in which for 14 years somewhere between 70,000 and 100,000 Bhutanese refugees have been kept idle and lingering in seven camps in eastern Nepal. It is long past due for the international community to develop a durable solution to this lamentable circumstance.
